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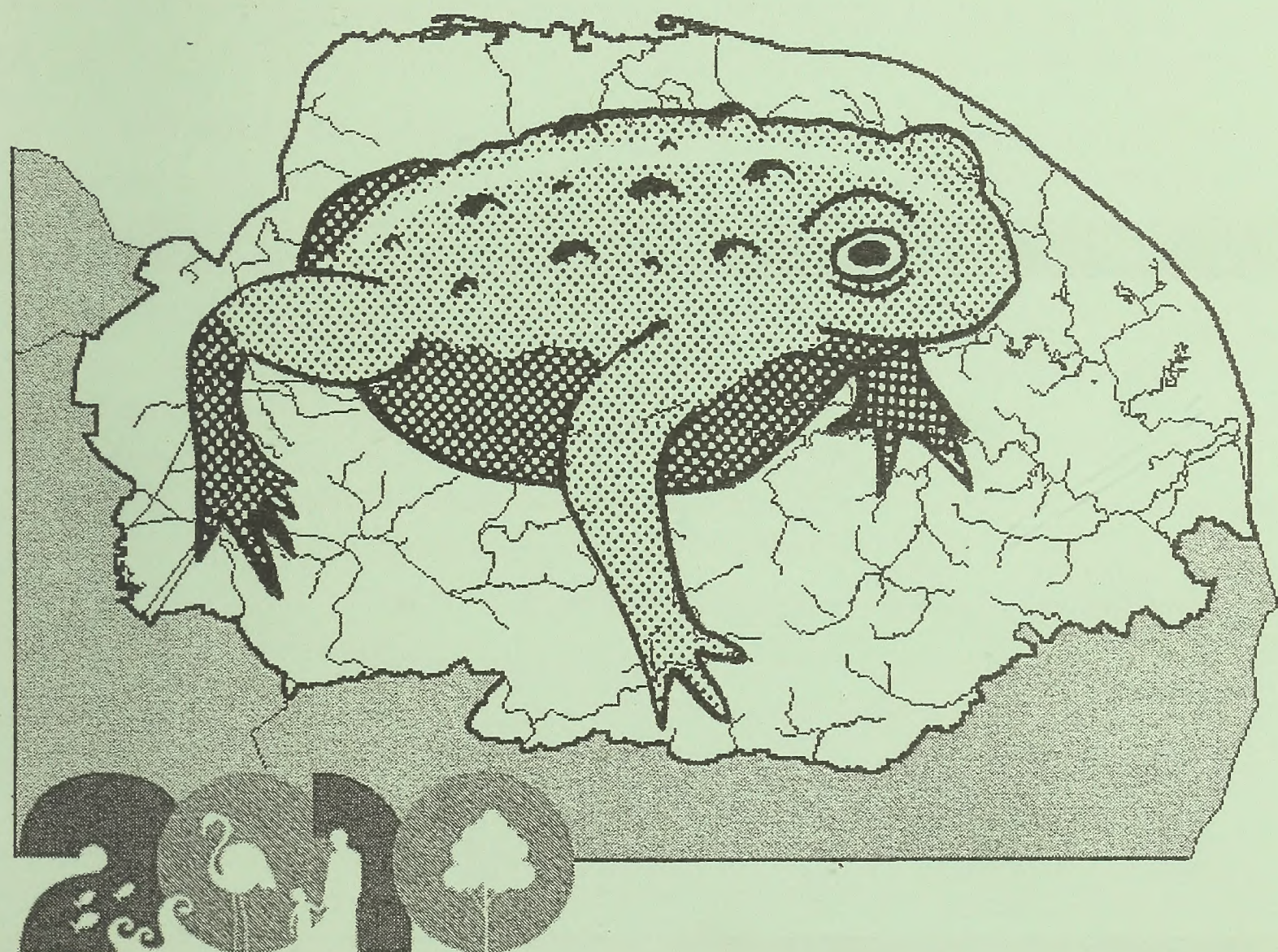
THE NATURAL  
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- 9 MAR 2010



# The Norfolk *Natterjack*

The quarterly bulletin of the Norfolk & Norwich Naturalists' Society



2010 International Year of Biodiversity

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Articles with the camera symbol have associated photographs in the Nats' Gallery (centre pages)



## Toad-in-the-hole....

Again many subjects are covered in this edition, from general observations to the more specific such as solitary bees, bark beetles, Barnacle Geese, Red-backed Shrike and Bittern. We also have some horror stories of being an urban naturalist and an introduction to the world of Axioophytes! In the report section there are accounts of two very interesting meetings on the 100th and 250th anniversaries of the birth of two great Norfolk Naturalists - Ted Ellis and Sir James Smith. Also the Bawsey Country Park excursion yielded yet more new records for the bryophyte enthusiasts. My thanks to all contributors and now that we are that closer to spring I trust you will be out and about and keen to forward your observations during 2010.

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## Ivy Flowers: a Wildlife Spectacular

Nick Owens



I have been enjoying watching and photographing insects visiting ivy flowers in Norfolk during September and October, so thought I would share a few photos and ideas with *Natterjack* readers. As with hogweed (see *Natterjack* 106, August 2009), ivy attracts quite a variety of insects, including both nectar/pollen-seekers and their predators. Ivy is not specialised for any particular insect species, as there is no corolla requiring a long tongue. The flowers have a pungent smell which presumably acts as an attractant. The anthers ripen first and visiting insects can become coated in pollen. By early October, many of the anthers have withered, but the stigmas then mature and the flowers continue to secrete nectar. The berries later provide food for birds, such as wood pigeons and wintering blackcaps.

Hornets were frequent visitors to ivy flowers and may be increasing in the county, which is towards the northern edge of their range. They were very difficult to photograph as they rarely settled during their predatory patrols. I saw them taking wasps and also observed a queen hornet drop onto a large worker buff-tailed bumblebee, but without success. Wasps were seen taking nectar as well as searching for insect prey. Their hunting technique was to fly among the foliage searching among the leaves, regularly settling and crawling over leaves during their search. Wasps did not appear to be interested in ladybirds as prey, perhaps because ladybirds are hard to grip hold of and/or are distasteful.





Despite the lateness of the season, eight species of hoverfly were recorded on ivy. It is not clear whether the black and yellow colouration typical of many hoverflies protects them against wasps, but I did not see any hoverflies taken. Perhaps their quick reactions usually saved them. The hoverfly *Eristalis tenax* is a more drab colour and is thought to be a honeybee mimic, aided by its habit of trailing the hind legs in flight, which gives the impression of having pollen baskets.

There are some recent newcomers to English ivy which may have an impact on its ecology. Harlequin ladybirds were commonly seen basking on ivy leaves. They are said to eat butterfly eggs, so it is possible that they will harm holly blue butterfly populations. Another new arrival specialises in ivy, namely the solitary bee *Colletes hederæ*. This species was first seen in Britain in 2001 and is now common in some southern English counties. It can swarm on ivy in great numbers and it is likely that it will compete with other insect species for ivy nectar and pollen. It may also become a new prey species for English wasps and hornets. It will be interesting to compare the insect fauna of ivy before and after its arrival – assuming it reaches us in Norfolk. I did see one *Colletes* on ivy in Weybourne, but it was probably not *C. hederæ*. *C. hederæ* is quite large – approaching honey-bee size. The stripes on its abdomen are yellowish in colour (see photos taken near Beaune in France). Any sightings should be reported to the Bees, Wasps and Ants Recording Society.

The insect species I recorded on ivy flowers in Norfolk in 2009 were:

## DIPTERA

### Sarcophagidae

*Sarcophaga carnaria* (Flesh fly)

### Tachinidae

*Tachina fera*

### Syrphidae

*Eristalis interruptus*

*Eristalis tenax* (Drone fly)

*Eupeodes* sp.

*Helophilus pendulus*

*Myathropa florea*

*Sericomyia silentis*

*Syritta pipiens*

*Syrphus ribesii*



## HYMENOPTERA

### Apidae

*Apis mellifera* (Honeybee)

*Bombus lapidarius* queen  
(Red-tailed bumblebee)

*Bombus pascuorum* worker  
(Common carder bumblebee)

*Bombus terrestris* worker and queen  
(Buff-tailed bumblebee)

*Bombus vestalis* female  
(Vestal cuckoo bumblebee)

*Colletes* sp.

### Vespidae

*Vespula vulgaris* (Common wasp)

*Vespula germanica* (German wasp)

*Vespa crabro* (Hornet)





## COLEOPTERA

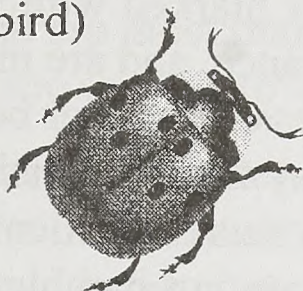
### Coccinellidae

*Coccinella 7-punctata*

(Seven-spot ladybird)

*Harmonia axyridis*

(Harlequin ladybird)



## LEPIDOPTERA

*Aglais urticae* (Small tortoiseshell)

*Lycaena phlaeas* (Small copper)

*Polygonia c-album* (Comma)

*Vanessa atalanta* (Red admiral)

*Vanessa cardui* (Painted lady)



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## *Andrena & Nomada – Some Early Spring Bees in Your Garden*



*Tim Strudwick*

Solitary bees are some of the first insects to get active in the spring, appearing on sunny days from late Feb onwards. This note aims to help the beginner in identifying some of the more recognisable and widespread spring species from two large genera.

*Andrena* is the largest genus of bees in the UK, with around 70 species. About half are found in Norfolk, and at least 10 are widespread and frequently found in gardens in the spring. All are ground-nesting, usually favouring sunny locations and light soils. Some often nest on lawns, leaving a distinctive conical pile of soil around the nest hole. Most species collect pollen from a range of flowers, though some specialise in one plant family or even a single species. Fruit trees and bushes are often visited and some species may be important pollinators. Females range from 7-18mm long, depending on species, and when freshly emerged at least, some species can be identified in the field – generally by the colour and distribution of hairs on the head, thorax, abdomen and legs. Worn females and the smaller males are much harder to separate. In some species even fresh females require microscopic examination. Most gardens will have at least one species of *Andrena* nesting - at least seven species nest in my 6m x 6m front garden.

One of the largest and earliest species is *Andrena clarkella* which collects pollen solely from willow catkins. From early March the very common, and much smaller, *A. bicolor* and the tiny, black *A. minutula* can be seen. By early April, several other species are active: the unmistakable *A. fulva* with its bright orange upperparts; *A. carantonica* (= *A. scotica*) a large, rather dull greyish brown species; *A. nigroaenea*, a large species with a “furry” abdomen and black face; *A. nitida*, with black and white hairs on the hind tibia and a glossy black





abdomen; *A. haemorrhoa*, with a distinctive tuft of orange hairs at the end of the abdomen, which collect pollen from shrubs of the family Rosacea; *A. flavipes*, with well defined whitish hair bands across each abdominal segment.

Most species of *Andrena* are parasitised by “cuckoo” bees of the genus *Nomada*. These “nomad” bees are usually boldly marked with yellow or red bands or spots, so are rather wasp-like in appearance, and are mostly 7-15mm long. *Nomada* females can often be seen hovering over lawns or borders, searching out the nests of their host. Finding a nest, they lay their egg inside. On hatching, their larva kills the egg or larva of the host, then eats the pollen store. Nomad bees can be tricky (male *N. flava* and *N. panzeri* are inseparable even under a microscope) to identify but many can be sorted out from good photos.

Most *Nomada* species are host specific, parasitizing just one or two *Andrena* species: *A. bicolor* is the host of *Nomada fabriciana*; *A. carantonica* is the main host of *N. flava* and *N. marshamella*; *A. nigroaenea* and *A. nitida* are both hosts of *N. goodeniana*; *A. fulva* is probably the main host of *N. panzeri*.

The photos in the centre pages illustrate a selection of the commoner spring species of *Andrena* and *Nomada* that may be found in gardens, woodland or scrub edge.

Solitary bees are very under-recorded in Norfolk and I will be grateful for any records, preferably accompanied by good digital photographs, ideally from several angles, to confirm the identity. These can be emailed to me at [timstrud@tiscali.co.uk](mailto:timstrud@tiscali.co.uk). The lack of accessible identification literature has always been an obstacle to anyone wishing to develop an interest in solitary bees, but 2010 should see the publication of two new UK guides covering solitary bees so there is no better time to get to grips with this fascinating group of insects.

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## A damsel in distress

Tony Howes



Just walking in the countryside can be very enjoyable, taking in the various shapes, colours, and sounds of nature's rich bounty, there are dramas going on all around, always something of interest to watch and observe in all the seasons of the year.

Recently I came across a spider (*Araneus marmoreus*, var: *pyramidatus*) struggling to overpower a damselfly caught in a web, it took several minutes before the prey was securely trussed up in a silken 'straight jacket,' a bit gruesome, but that's nature in the raw, I didn't stop to see the end.





# Barking mad?

Robert Maidstone

"That elm on the other side of the moat is dying" my employer said as we surveyed the tall, almost leafless tree in mid summer. Only a few leaves fluttered from the top most branches. "We'll have that down this year, when the moat dries out" she said - 'We' of course meant me!

So, in late summer, when the water was no longer visible in the moat I was detailed to cut the tree down, missing of course her well tended garden on this side of the moat. I had to cut off the side branches as I climbed upwards to allow the higher branches to fall straight down into the moat, then as I climbed down I lopped off 1-3 metre lengths of the trunk as I descended until at last the standing trunk was less than the width of the moat and I could cut it off at ground level. Even though I could walk across the moat the bottom was sufficiently soft for the trunk to bury itself some way into the dark and smelly mud on the bottom of the moat.

As I logged the trunk into manageable pieces I noticed, where the still soft and moist bark tore as the logs were cut up, the tunnels of the Elm Bark Beetles, *Scolytus* sp. These beetles are attracted by the dying tree and gnaw short tunnels in the soft bark where the female lays her eggs in niches along each side. The larvae burrow through the moist nutritious bast between the bark and wood at right angles to the parents tunnel. When they are full grown they make a small round cell and pupate. By the time the beetle hatch the bark has dried out and is not suitable for their offspring so they fly off to another dying tree. A few of the larvae had begun to form the cells but no adults were present so I was surprised to find in one of the tunnels a long cigar coloured beetle quite unlike the dumpy bark beetles.

I temporally abandoned my work and potted the beetle into one of the containers I carry with me for such new finds. Later on while I was splitting the logs into pieces and carting them into the wood shed I found two other similar beetles crawling about on the bark of the logs and added then to my collection.

Later at home I consulted my beetle books and after a while I tentatively identified these beetles as *Aulonium trisulcatum*, a very rare beetle associated with *Scolytus* on elm in Middlesex! Since my beetle books were written back in the 1930's I emailed one of the counties beetle experts to see if the beetle had extended its range in recent years.

His reply was that the beetles range had fluctuated with the waves of Dutch Elm disease spread by the Elm Bark Beetle but he had never seen this beetle and the





only record for Norfolk was back in the 1940's. Not only did he want to see the beetles but he would also like to see if we could find some more on site.

So a few evenings later we turned up at my employers, carefully removed the logs from her wood shed and sat stripping the bark off looking for these beetles. Over an hour later after almost emptying the shed we admitted defeat having found no more beetles and began to throw the logs back into the shed, then he noticed a slight movement on one of the discarded pieces of bark and there in the crevice in the bark sat one of these beetles. His face shone with joy! He continued to search the bark as we threw it back, but found no more.

As we walked to the cars he said that he had hoped to get two or three beetles rather than just one so I pulled from my pocket the container with my three in and offered him two of the mine. Lost for words he proffered the tube containing the beetle he had found and I dropped in a piece of bark with the two beetles on. A few moments later as he clasped the tube in his hand his face fell slightly and he mused on how he would know which of the three beetles was the one he found. "That's easy" I said as he settled into his car, "yours is in the bottom of the tube, mine are on the bark".

He smiled feebly and drove off into the evening twilight. "Rum things experts" I thought as I too got into my car and headed home.

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## Wander & Wonder

*Tony Howes*



I joined a carol service just before Christmas and one of the carol titles was 'Wander & Wonder'. I thought this very apt for the heading of this piece, as very often I find myself wandering the countryside and standing in wonder at things I see.

A few days ago I heard a sound that, for me, is the very soul of wilderness, the lovely soft bugling call of Bewick Swans. Coming across the sky were around one hundred of them, very high, and heading south-west, I stood in awe as they passed over, you cannot buy glorious moments like that.

Then there was the Chinese Water Deer, while walking along the river path at Strumpshaw I came face to face with him but he either hadn't seen me, or didn't associate me with danger. He was eating crab apples that lay thick on the ground, I was able to inch closer each time he put his head down to eat, when the penny dropped, I was no further away than twenty feet and I could clearly see every mark on him. Just for one split second we looked into one another's eyes, then he was away, I found myself smiling with pleasure at the memory of





the meeting.

The third instance of these wonderful moments happened when I was sitting behind a screen waiting for a Kingfisher to turn up, a movement caught my eye, it was a wren creeping like a mouse through the undergrowth, it came right up and onto my right foot, it then progressed up my trouser leg till it was on my right knee. Here, possible because the sun was warm it opened one wing and sunbathed – for possibly 30 seconds it lay there, I hardly dare breathe, so unexpected was the meeting. It then continued it's never ceasing journey through the undergrowth in the quest for food.

I get immense pleasure from the natural world, the three tales mentioned here, and many like them, will live in my memory for a long time. I hope there will be many more yet to come.

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## *Barnacle Geese*

*Hans Watson*



One of my favourite wildlife spectacles is the sight and sound of a large flight of geese, particularly Barnacle Geese, and whilst Norfolk does not have the wonderful great gatherings that the Solway Firth and Hebrides have, we can still enjoy smaller flocks of Barnacles in Norfolk.

Always a popular species with collectors of waterfowl, many birds have escaped over the years, and free flying flocks have gradually built up, especially in areas containing large ornamental collections.

In the Yare valley, flocks of Barnacles have wintered on the grazing marshes between Reedham and Strumpshaw for quite a few years. The largest flock that I have seen numbered 120 birds, and although having descended from captive birds, they have reverted to the same wary ways of their wild ancestors, and it is difficult to get close to them. These flocks seem to break up into smaller groups at times, especially in spring when the birds that are going to breed go to their chosen breeding locations. One of these locations is the Minsmere RSPB reserve, where I understand that at least 23 pairs bred in 2008.

Until about 40 years ago, Barnacle Geese came from three main populations. These were located in Greenland, Svalbard, and Novaya Zemlya in the Arctic. Then in about 1975 a fourth population, believed to be derived from the Novaya Zemlya population, began breeding on islands in the Baltic Sea, and well south of the Arctic Circle.

The vast majority of books and field-guides on British Birds list Barnacle Geese as winter visitors to Britain, with no mention being made of a feral breeding





population. This is strangely not surprising, as it took over 100 years for the Egyptian Goose to be officially accepted as a British breeding bird, and then, less than 40 years later declared a pest, even though the population is thought to be only 700 pairs. The number of pairs of Barnacle Geese nesting in Britain is thought to be about 1000. I cannot help wondering how long it will be before Barnacles Geese are declared pests.

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## The Red-backed Shrike

*Dick Foyster*

Like many boys of my age during the 'fifties our interest in birds centered around collecting their eggs.

In those days Mousehold Heath was, just that, a linnet haunted paradise of gorse and heather, birch dells full of Chiffchaffs, Wood and Willow Warblers. There was a great sandpit on the south eastern corner, today it's the valley drive estate, but in those days it was full of nesting Skylarks, and Yellow Hammers wheezing away on the bordering thorn bushes. There was also another bird to be found along the barbed wire fences bordering the training field of Britannia Barracks, quite a common bird in those days, the Red-backed Shrike.

I was born and grew up in Britannia Barracks where my father was resident engineer, and it was he who took me on my first wanderings of the heath. I had noticed the occasional lizard or beetle impaled on the boundary fence, but it was awhile before I realised how it got there.

In my search for nests I would spend time watching the birds which would lead me to their eggs, and while watching the shrikes, I realised I was enjoying that more than wanting an egg for my collection. The spark ignited the flame and I became a lifelong birdwatcher. There were three pairs of shrike nesting along the boundary fence in the bushes, and another two pairs in the sandpit, known as Edwards's pit, Eddie's, as we called it.

In later years I took along an old friend, veteran bird photographer, the late Reggie Gaze. Reg set up his hide and tripod and I left him to it, but later helped him to develop some lovely black and white photos of the female Red-backed Shrike at the nest.

So much has happened since those far off days, Mousehold has changed completely, and as mentioned earlier Eddie's pit is a housing estate. Britannia Barracks, home of the Fourth Battalion The Royal Norfolk Regiment, is now part of H.M. Norwich Prison, and the Red-backed Shrike is long gone.





# Bittern on ice

*Tony Howes*



The recent frosty and snowy weather has had an adverse effect on wildlife, making it more difficult to find food, birds in particular tend to suffer in these harsh conditions.

As happens most years there has been an increase of Bitterns at Strumpshaw fen this winter, there are least four there at the time of writing (end of December). Frozen water means the birds are finding it difficult to find enough to eat, but they hang on, somehow managing to find something to keep them going. They quite often take to wing, and flying low over the reeds, drop into a new area to begin the search afresh, the base of the reed beds is most likely free of ice, and they find some thing to eat there.

Recently, while watching from the fen hide, a Bittern was seen to drop into a small stand of reed in front, several minutes later it emerged out of the other side and walked across the ice giving good views and a chance for a photograph.

Its always a thrill to see one of these charismatic birds, they are probably best known for their far carrying 'booming' in the spring, most of the time they wander about in the reed beds searching for frogs and fish, to see one out in the open walking on the ice is a rare treat.

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## *Strumpshaw Diary*

*Brian MacFarlane*



There has been a slight decline in the number of birds normally seen at Strumpshaw. I think this has been a similar pattern on other reserves.

The month of September saw a dramatic lowering of water levels to try and eliminate the last of the salt that had pervaded the reserve from the previous high tides. A cormorant is drying it's wings where once the water covered the mud. It normally would have sat on a post or tree branch to do that. The water levels were raised a little before the Autumn maintenance began.

Over the last 12 months there has been a number of friends meeting regularly in the Fen hide on a Tuesday. We call it a coffee morning without the coffee, it's healthier! This particular group all have cameras, so we have the same aim to capture those magic moments. I sometimes feel part of the crew of a Man O' War galleon. The apertures we look through in the hide remind me of the gun





ports. When a Bittern flies across our front a barrage of Canons, and (the odd Nikon) will open fire on the poor bird. The deafening sound of shutters clattering don't seem to deter it. The big difference is the bittern lives to fly another day. So really you could call us conservationists!

A Great Northern Diver appeared for several weeks on the river Yare along side the reserve. It gave great opportunities to photograph it, and was catching fish of all species, so that was why it was not in a hurry to move on.

It has been pleasing to see Otters on quite a few occasions. I was lucky enough to witness 4 of them right in front of me squabbling over an eel one had caught.

December arrived and I hadn't seen the Bittern flying for quite sometime. I was very fortunate when a female Marsh Harrier came close to the hide for a photo. Harriers rarely come closer than a 100 yards. Bearded tits flit among the reed beds outside the hide but are very quick and hard to see in thick reed beds.

Towards the end of December we suddenly got a cold snap with a fair covering of snow and ice. All of the open water was engulfed in ice, which gave the Pheasant a different playground who took full advantage to try it out. (see photo). With the sun out and a very cold air temperature everywhere looked breath taking!

I enjoy the changing seasons at Strumpshaw, and this winter snow has been exceptional. With the New Year upon us , I wonder if the weather will produce even more spectacular events. WATCH THIS SPACE!

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## Encounters with the public

*Colin Jacobs*

In "A few observations" (*Natterjack* 107) Tony Howes mentions a nosy lady who typically enquired after his business when studying nature and when given a truthful answer ran off screaming.

I would like to relate some of my often strange occurrences of lay people versus the naturalist and how silly comments often arise from my studies as a naturalist.

Once on Broome Heath near Bungay I was laying prone on the ground peering into the grass to locate some grasshoppers. Suddenly I was pulled by the lower legs out from my observation point and turned over onto my back as quick as a flash. I had been observed laying still for so long that the man walking his dog had thought I was dead. The sirens approaching the heath were for me. An ambulance and two Police Cars.





# NATS' GALLERY: February 2010



**Axiophytes.** Not rare in Norfolk, but indicative of special places. Clockwise: **Flea Sedge, Changing Forget-me-not, Ramsons, Water Aven, Rough Hawkbit, Trailing St John's-wort.** See article. *Photos:* Simon Harrap/norfolknature.co.uk.





**Solitary bees, Genus *Andrena*.**

Left (top to bottom): *A. bicolor* female; *A. clarkella* male; *A. haemorrhoa* female; *A. minutula* female.

Right (top to bottom): *A. carantonica* female; *A. flavipes* female; *A. nitida* female.

See article. Photos: Tim Strudwick.





## Solitary bees.

Above: **Genus *Andrena***.

Left to right: *A. clarkella* female; *A. nigroaenea* female; *A. fulva* female.

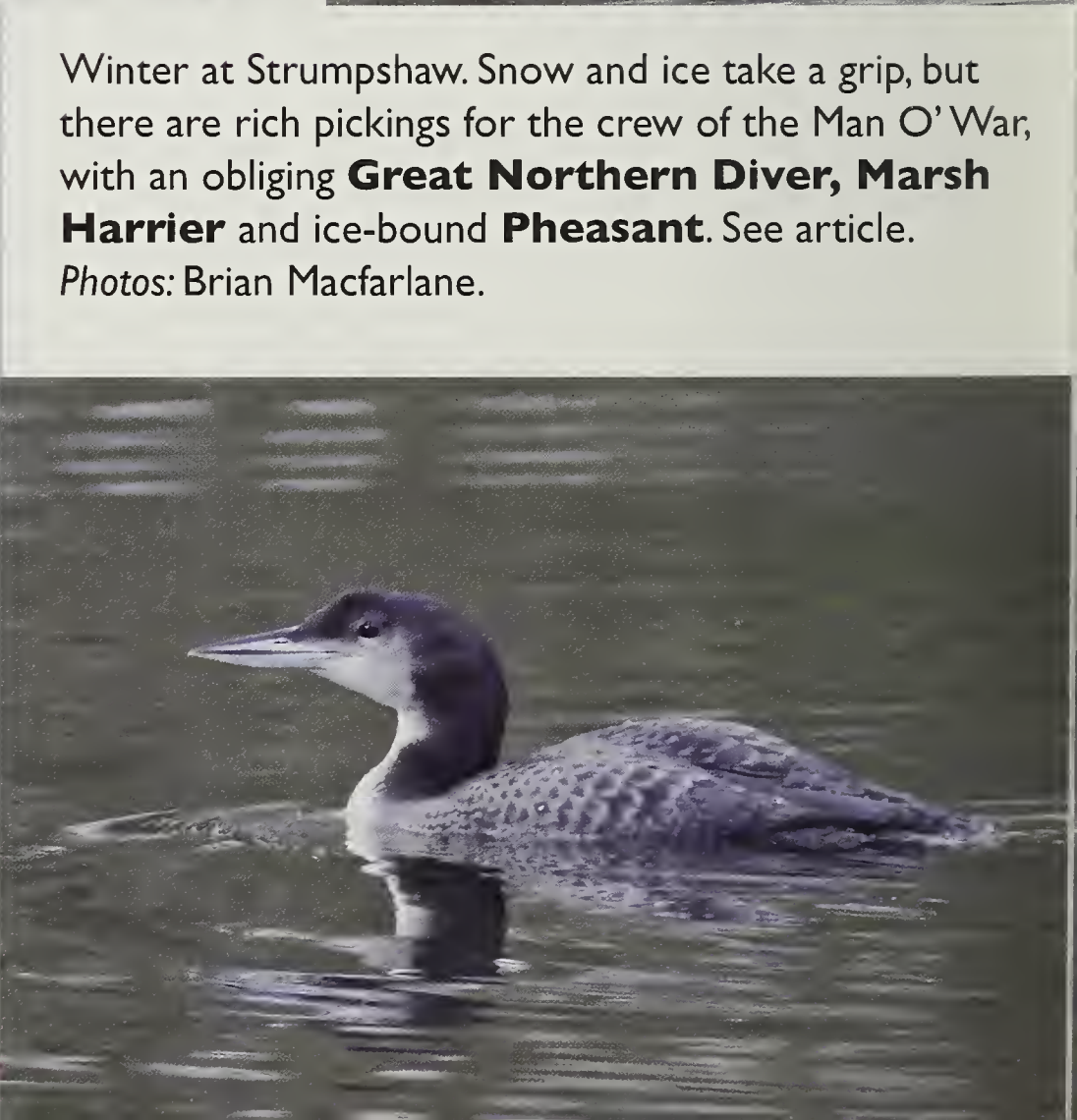
Below and right: **Genus *Nomada***.

Clockwise from right: *N. goodeniana* female; *N. marshamella* female; *N. fabriciana* female; *N. flava* female; *N. panzeri* female

See article. Photos: Tim Strudwick.







Winter at Strumpshaw. Snow and ice take a grip, but there are rich pickings for the crew of the Man O' War, with an obliging **Great Northern Diver**, **Marsh Harrier** and ice-bound **Pheasant**. See article.  
*Photos: Brian Macfarlane.*



**Bewick's Swans, Chinese Water Deer, Wren and Bittern** on ice. See article. *Photos: Tony Howes.*



**Barnacle Geese.** Once just a winter visitor, and confined to northern England and Scotland, this species is now increasingly regular in the south due to the presence of locally bred birds. See article. *Photos: Hans Watson*



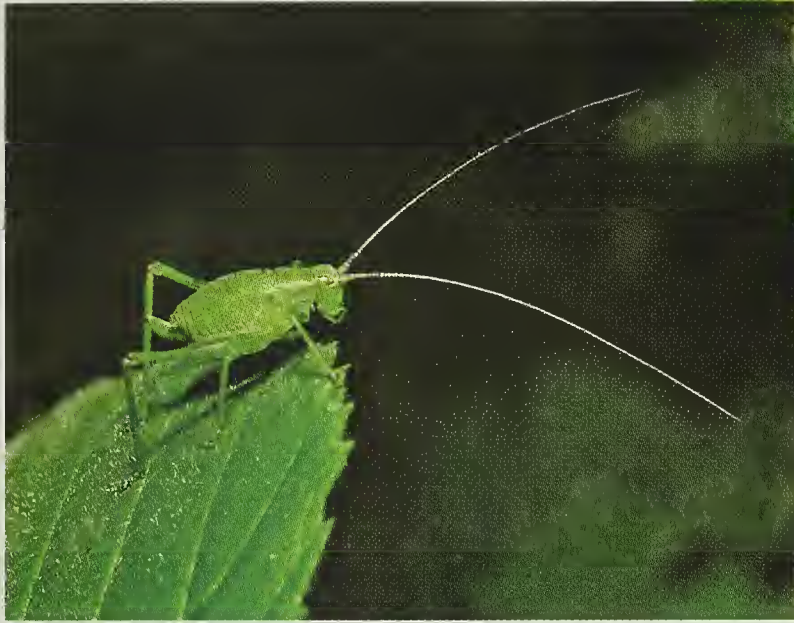


**Insects on Ivy.** A great variety of creatures are attracted to this late-flowering climber. Clockwise from top left: *Sarcophaga carnaria* (flesh fly); *Helophilus pendulus* (hoverfly); *Myathropa florea* (hoverfly); *Bombus terrestris* Buff-tailed Bumblebee, worker; *Colletes hederæ* Ivy Bee, male; *Colletes hederæ* female. The first four photos were taken in Norfolk, the shots of *Colletes hederæ* in France. See article. Photos: Nick Owens.





**The spider *Araneus marmoreus*, var. *pyramidatus***, struggling to over-power a damselfly, and **Speckled Bush-cricket**. See article. *Photos: Tony Howes.*



**Western Conifer Seed Bug**  
*Leptoglossus occidentalis* found wandering on the sand in the

sunshine at Horsey Gap on 18 October 2009. This impressive bug from western North America was first reported in Europe in 1999 (in Italy) and has rapidly spread across the continent. During autumn 2008/2009 influxes of immigrants were reported from the coast of southern England, but the wide scatter of inland records also suggests arrival via timber shipments. This may be the first record for Norfolk but, like the Harlequin Ladybird, it is a beast we will all become familiar with over the next few years! (One was also found at Weybourne on 28 October 2009.) *Photos: Dougal McNeill.*





The Moss Group's meeting at Bawsey Country Park produced amongst the bryophytes ***Pseudoscleropodium purum***, both fruiting abundantly (top left) and supporting the uncommon fungus ***Arrhenia retiruga*** (above); also ***Racomitrium canescens*** (left), as well as **Pipe Club *Macrotyphula fistulosa*** (below) and **Woolly Milkcap *Lactarius torminosus***. See article. Photos: Robin Stevenson.





During the recording for the forthcoming Suffolk Flora I was searching the tetrads in Blundeston near Lowestoft when the usual slowing down of cars and people looking out of house windows at me started. Soon, as expected a woman came out of her house and enquired "What are you dong?" (Oh how often have us naturalists heard that before). I replied that I was searching for and recording wild flowers. In a pompous tone she said "I don't believe you, there are no wild flowers here only weeds, I am calling the Police."

The Police never did arrive and that was the only time that I felt uncomfortable botanising in an urban setting throughout my three visits to Blundeston that year.

One morning I was walking with my telescope and tripod on my shoulders and binoculars around my neck at Whitlingham Country Park when I was accosted by yet another woman dog walker who said "Excuse me but why are you shooting the ducks? I explained that it was a telescope on a tripod and as I removed it off my shoulder to prove it she screamed "Don't shoot me!" and ran off dragging her dog with her. I awaited the Police hearing the sirens approaching and on attendance they smiled and relieved that I was no danger sent me on my way.

Finally I have been frequently followed by gangs of children, stoned by them, had dogs set on me and adults calling me wierdo and much worse. It seems that the Field Naturalist is treated with a lot of suspicion nowadays unless we are birders and then most lay people don't seem to bother.

I have many more amusing stories of the public versus the naturalist in 38 years of nature study - as I am sure you do!

(Colin wonders if any other members have similar stories - if so please send them in to '*Natterjack*' - Ed.)

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## A canny cricket

*Tony Howes*



Another insect encounter recently was with a Speckled Bush Cricket, a fine little beastie. They are not uncommon and turn up fairly frequently, but they have the annoying habit of always trying to get round the other side of the stem or branch they are on to get out of danger, but with a little care, and some luck with a grass stem they can usually be manoeuvred into a position better suited for the camera.





# Birds New to Norfolk

*Don Dorling*

I recently purchased a copy of the newly published book '*Birds New to Norfolk*' written by the well-known Norfolk birdwatchers Keith Dye, Mick Fiszler and Peter Allard. The authors' intention is to bring together the accounts of the discovery and identification of all the birds currently on the list of birds found in the County and I found it to be a fascinating read.

Obviously there is a great deal of literature recording the first appearances of birds occurring since the great expansion of the hobby subsequent to the Second World War and the authors have been able to include many of the reports of the initial finders. For example, two of the latest discoveries, the White-crowned Sparrow that spent several weeks at Cley early in 2008 and the Black Lark found at Winterton in April 2008, are both covered by three pages each.

However, for a common species such as the Blackbird, it has been much more difficult to find very early references, although in this case it seems that the L'Estrange family paid for four specimens, presumably to eat, in 1522! Other early reports have been discovered in the writings of Sir Thomas Browne and Robert Marsham.

In Victorian times many of the early first records were birds obtained for collectors. One very interesting and lengthy account in the book is that of the Pallas's Leaf Warbler shot at Cley on 31<sup>st</sup> October 1896. This was the first British record of this species and the preserved specimen changed hands for the sum of £50; a great deal of money at that time. Apparently it can be found today in the Birmingham Museum.

Dipping in to the book I was reminded that the Black Kite over West Runton on 14<sup>th</sup> May 1966 was seen and identified by the late David Butt. He was the friend who introduced me to bird watching whilst we were at school together in 1947. Later that afternoon the kite caused considerable excitement at Cley where I happened to be present. This led me to turn up my old notebooks and I discovered that I have seen thirteen more 'firsts' for the County. I must have been a bigger 'twitcher' than I realised!

I am sure that many more readers of this 400-page volume will be similarly reminded of exciting days bird watching in the County.

***Birds New to Norfolk***, Kieth Dye, Mick Fiszler & Peter Allard, 413pp, Hardback, Wren Publishing (2009) ISBN 978-0-9542545-3-7 (£35).





# Waveney Forest Saved from Gravel Extraction

Colin Jacobs

During the past eighteen months I have been involved in gathering records from local naturalists for the former Suffolk sandling heath at Waveney Forest - Fritton TG4601 - Vice county 25 East Suffolk and VC 26 East Norfolk due to the change in the political boundary in the 1960's. We botanists consider it to be Suffolk for recording purposes to where the Watsonian boundary of Suffolk reaches the south side of Breydon water.

In 2008 Norfolk County Council announced that the forest, mainly planted with Scot's Pine *Pinus sylvestris* in the mid 1950's, would be felled and a series of gravel pits would be dug, however, after the extraction the site would be turned into a nature reserve with flooded pits. During my work there I made enemies, mainly among the locals, who were more worried about losing a dog walking site. Events involved the police in an attempted blackmail "to stop me sending in my records" and one case of out an out bribery which I severely declined.

The site particularly along the edge of the River Waveney produced the scarce Marsh Mallow *Althaea officinalis*, Marsh Sow Thistle *Sonchus palustris*, Bell Heather *Erica cinerea* and Heather *Calluna vulgaris*.

Several meetings and petitions were written and many local naturalists, now firm friends, rallied round and supported the cause. In June 2009 I was informed the site would not become a gravel extraction area due to the rare flora and fauna found there by my team of naturalists. I have hundreds of records of not only my own but from the Lowestoft Field Club, the Late Harold Jenner and Dr E.A Ellis. Sadly the locals were not really interested in the wildlife in the forest as their highest concern was where they would walk their dogs!

The underlying message is that all natural history records from past to present were able to be collated and a report made which helped the Norfolk County Council decide that the wildlife was just too important to destroy by gravel workings.





# Axiophytes: A Tool for Conservation

Simon Harrap & Bob Ellis



The Botanical Society of the British Isles (BSBI), especially the BSBI Co-ordinator Alex Lockton, has been championing the use of lists of plants which have been given the status of *axiophyte*, not only to determine the value of particular sites for conservation but also to measuring changes, both 'natural' changes produced by processes such as succession and changes produced by human intervention, including conservation management.

What are axiophytes? Quite simply, they are 'important' plants that are indicators of 'good habitat'. The name (freshly coined in 2005) comes from the Greek for 'worthy', so they are 'worthy' plants. At this point you might groan and say, 'but we have Red Data Book species, Nationally Scarce species, BAP species, etc., etc., so why on earth do we need another category?' The answer is that we need a tool that is simple and easy to use that will give an *objective* measure of a site's worth. SSSIs are very rarely designated on the basis of *rare* vascular plant species alone and, coming down the scale to county wildlife sites and the many undesignated but interesting places around the country, we have to ask: what makes a site a 'good' one? Is it the presence of rare species, or threatened species, or 'indicator' species, or perhaps a combination of all three? To get much further, we need to define our terms:

'Rare' plants are species whose population / distribution has fallen below a certain threshold. For the last *Red Data Book*, it was plants that occurred in 15 or few 10 km squares in Britain, whilst 'Nationally Scarce' covered the species that fell into the band from 16 to 100 occupied 10 km squares. Of course, we can also draw up a list of Rare and Scarce plant for Norfolk, based on the *Flora* (or indeed Rare and Scarce plants in Edgefield!)

'Threatened' species are those that are in decline, be it a long slow decline or a recent collapse in numbers. The government has recently updated its system of conservation designations to bring it into line with fairly strict (and complex) international standards (*The Vascular Plant Red Data List for Great Britain*, Cheffings *et. al.* 2005).

'Indicator' species are those which are deemed to mark out certain particular habitats. The best-known are 'ancient woodland indicators', plants thought to mark out those sites which have been wooded for at least the last 400 years or so.

A plant may fall in to all three of these categories, and be Rare, Threatened and an Indicator, or it may fall in to just one (for example, quite a few 'rare' plants are not threatened; they have always been rare and have small but stable populations).





Rare and Threatened plants are not much use in selecting good places for plants. Of course, most or all rare plants merit protection, but by definition these species are not very common and many sites will not have any at all. Threatened plants are not much better, in that populations of plants go up and down due to a whole variety of factors, and unless we understand why a particular plant is declining it is hard to attach much significance to the decline let alone plan effective conservation action. Simply selecting sites on the basis that they hold large numbers of declining species may in fact be counter-productive, in that we pour all our effort into habitats and places that are doomed!

Indicator species fare better as a measure of a site's value, and the concept has been developed for habitats including Ancient Woodland, arable fields and grazing marsh dykes. The Axiophyte idea is really a way of developing this to cover all the important habitats and a much wider range of plants. Axiophytes are plants that we want more of because they represent habitats and/or environmental conditions that are considered desirable from the conservation standpoint. Even non-natives can be axiophytes if they mark out those special places, something that would never be ordinarily considered; this is particularly relevant to arable habitats. Alex Lockton estimates that around 20% of the species in a county could end up on the list, and therefore they would be sufficiently common and widespread that really meaningful statistical comparisons can be made between sites and over time.

The way the system could work is that a list of axiophytes is drawn up for Norfolk. They will be the plants that pick out all the habitats that we want to conserve, such as primary woodland, unpolluted waters, heathland, calcareous, neutral and acid grasslands, nutrient-poor fens etc., as well as the environmental conditions that tend to promote biodiversity (we are thinking here of the plants that do best in soils that are very poor in nutrients). Importantly, they will be the ones that do not tend to occur as commonly, if at all, in the less desirable habitats such as secondary woodland, polluted waters, bog-standard road verges etc.

Once we have agreed lists, sites can be scored. It could be one point per species, or could be weighted, to give the most characteristic or demanding species a higher score. Although it has been suggested that this does not add much to the value of the system, it helps to give a boost to important but relatively species-poor habitats, such as good acid bog and dwarf shrub heath, which would otherwise be undervalued. The points are totted up and the total gives an indication of the value of the site. Based on Bob Ellis's draft list for Norfolk, a score of <10 = poor, 10-19 = moderate, 20-29 = good and 30+ =





excellent. We may discover that we have sites that are right up there with the best SSSIs in the county, but have no protection, whilst some SSSIs may fare very badly. And, when it comes to planning decisions, an axiophyte list will allow *hard evidence* to be offered for a site's value (at present, if an unprotected site lacks anything that is nationally rare or threatened, it can all too easily be written off for development). Equally useful, we can evaluate sites 'before and after' major conservation management, the introduction of grazing etc., or simply as they change over time, making axiophytes an ideal monitoring tool. The big problem that the NWT and other organisations have is *effective monitoring* of their reserves: the 'proper' way to do this is via National Vegetation Classification (NVC) surveys, but these are time-consuming and highly skilled (= expensive) and consequently do not happen very often! The value of axiophytes in site monitoring has yet to be tested – the concept is too new - but less formal systems have been useful in, for example, demonstrating the dramatic decline in the plant diversity on Dorset's heathlands.

There are of course some potential problems, but these can surely be ironed out over time.

1. An axiophyte score measures *habitat diversity* as well as the quality of specific habitats. While this is no bad thing, major changes may adjust a balance between habitats without changing the overall score.
2. Comparing scores still requires equivalent levels of survey – both in temporal/geographic coverage and in botanical/survey competence.
3. Although scores are not entirely dependent on site area, they are not independent either. It may be necessary to think of a different approach for very small sites (e.g. roadside verges, churchyards, small meadows etc.)

The draft list of Norfolk Axiophytes, drawn up by Bob Ellis, is on the NNNs website ([www.nnns.org.uk](http://www.nnns.org.uk)) and we would love to have as much feedback as possible.

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## BSBI Offers and Wants

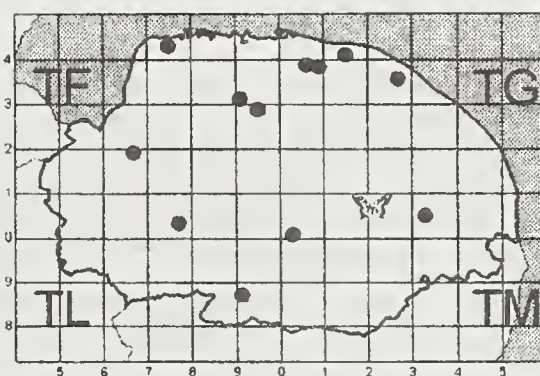
I have the following BSBI (Botanical Society of the British Isles) News free to a good home. The recipient may collect or pay postage. I will split. In return I am looking for any pre 1990 Watsonias to complete my BSBI Collection.

Vol 3 no 2 May 1974, No.3 Nov 1974, No.9, March 1975, No.10 Sep 1975, no.11 Sep 1975, No12 Feb 1976, No13 Sep 1976, No 13 Dec 1976, No15 April 1977, No16 Sep 1977, No.17, Dec 1977, No.18 April 1968, No.19 Sep 1978, No.20 Dec 1978, No 21 April 1977, No.22 Oct 1979, No.23 Dec 1979 No.24 April 1980, No.26 Dec 1980, No 27 April 1981, No.28 Sep 1981, No.29, Dec 1981, No32. Dec 1982 x 2, No.73, Sep 1996, No77. Dec 1997, No 82 Sep 1999, No 84. April 2000.

*Colin Jacobs - 01502 719752*







## THE PEOPLE'S NATURALIST

Tuesday 12th October, 2009

He died in 1986. Few people in the hall had actually met him. Even fewer could claim to have been a friend. Yet it was as if Ted Ellis was there with us at the meeting, so strong is his legacy of a lifetime of pioneering work in natural history.

The occasion was the first in the Society's winter series of indoor meetings in our new venue, St Andrew's Church Hall, Eaton, Norwich – an evening of memories to mark the centenary of Ted's birth.

Ted, dubbed "The People's Naturalist", was indeed there – on film, a compilation of archive television footage put together by the former BBC producer, Dick Meadows. It recalled his childhood in Guernsey, his years as keeper of natural history at the Castle Museum and his life at Wheatfen from 1946 until his death 40 years later (the film was shown by David Nobbs, long-serving warden of the Ted Ellis Reserve at Wheatfen).

Past-president Ken Durrant, a Fellow of the Royal Entomological Society since 1946, knew Ted better than anyone at the meeting. Ken, who started collecting insects at the age of three and is still as enthusiastic as ever at the age of 89, said that he would send specimens to Ted who would always telephone the next day, usually very early. They spoke at least once a fortnight and Ted would sometimes phone to ask Ken if he had anything new that he could write about in his *Eastern Daily Press* column. He recalled once frightening Ted by presenting him with a bottle of Colorado beetles. Fortunately, they were all dead.

Another past-president, Rex Hancy, one of Ted's successors as an EDP Countryside columnist, said that Ted was a legend. The legend actually grew in his lifetime and was still growing. "He is still a sort of living presence with us," he said. Ted was so approachable. Anyone could ask him a question and he would do his best to answer. He had an aura of authority. People could trust what he said. He respected his subjects. He did not use them to say, "Look at me" but "Look at this wonderful creation and I will do my best to explain it to you." He could turn prose into poetry but the core of his writing was its simplicity. His writing was clear and to the point.





Chris Blenkiron described how he had spent five years on the mammoth task of compiling a database of all Ted's writing – 14,000 articles from 40 years of writing for the *Eastern Daily Press*, plus many hundreds more from other publications, a total of more than 17,000 articles. Work was now under way on cataloguing 20,000 slides housed at the Castle Museum. Everything Ted wrote he filed meticulously at Wheatfen. Every letter he ever received and every reply he sent was also filed. [Note: The articles themselves are not on line but copies can be provided for research or general interest by Chris Blenkiron, 143 Norwich Road, New Costessey, Norwich NR5 0LD]

Dr Tony Irwin, the present curator of natural history at the Castle Museum, looked back to his first meeting with Ted at Wheatfen. He had asked a colleague, John Ismay, what Ted was like. "... like a tortoise", he was told. "The door opened and I saw what John meant – a large carapace-like jacket, from which emerged a rather scrawny neck, topped by a head containing two very twinkly eyes." Ted was always willing to share his knowledge and keen to learn new things.

He joined the museum in 1928 and left in 1956. For 26 years he was in charge of natural history and mostly on his own. He was curator, conservator, exhibit designer, technician, lecturer and biological recorder. He somehow found time to write as well and he studied everything he could. No doubt due to his reputation, many important collections were donated to the museum because the donors knew he would look after their life's work.

Ted was not afraid to produce an exhibit explaining fairly complex research. "I don't know what he would have thought of today's 'dumbing down' where we are told not to lose the interest of our audience but in doing so tell them nothing interesting," said Tony. Perhaps Ted's most notable contribution was the creation of the Norfolk Room dioramas, paid for by public subscription. Ted's contribution to natural history at the Castle was recognised in 1987 when the room was renamed *The Ted Ellis Norfolk Room*.

More than 50 years have passed since Ted worked at the museum but the evidence of his time there is still present. Indeed, Ted left a little of himself. One of his teeth completes the set in the skeleton. Tony, who sports a fine head of hair and a beard, said he wondered what might be expected of him – but he had noticed that the lion's mane was getting a bit thin!

David Paull

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## Bawsey Country Park

Saturday 7<sup>th</sup> November



The Bawsey Country Park, just outside King's Lynn, was the venue for the Moss Group's annual Beginners meeting. In the event, although it was a day of beautiful weather, only six people turned up, none of who were absolute beginners.





The Country Park is situated in an area of old sand workings; it has several large lakes within it, as well as considerable topographic variety, with steep slopes (associated with the old quarry sides) in places. Although the dominant substrate consists of acid Lower Cretaceous sands (the Leziate Sands), some geological variety is provided by scatterings of Anglian till ("Chalky boulder clay"). Locally, iron pyrite nodules, discarded and concentrated during the extraction process, are weathering to provide very acid, toxic conditions.

A list of some 74 different species had already been recorded from the site, including new vice-county 28 records for the minute epiphytic liverwort *Cololejeunea minutissima*, and small populations of the Red Data Book liverwort *Lophozia capitata*. In the course of the day a further nine species of moss were added to the total, viz. *Barbula unguiculata*; *Bryum argenteum*; *Cryphaea heteromalla*; *Didymodon luridus*; *Fissidens bryoides*; *Fissidens incurvus*; *Leptodictyum riparium*; *Plagiomnium undulatum*; *Sphagnum subnitens*, *Thuidium tamariscinum*; *Tortula muralis*, and one liverwort, *Frullania dilatata*. In addition good populations of most of the previously listed species were seen, which formed a useful revision course for those whose bryology had got a little rusty during the summer lay-off period.

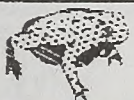
One of the highlights of the day was the discovery, by Bob Ellis, of a considerable colony of the moss *Pseudoscleropodium purum* fruiting abundantly. This is a plant that fruits very rarely in the UK, even though it is generally a common and abundant plant, consequently much photographic effort was devoted to it. Earlier, we had found the same moss with the uncommon fungus *Arrhenia retiruga* growing on it.

Another highlight was a chance to see a recently discovered colony of *Racomitrium canescens*; regarded as 'Locally abundant on sandy heaths and dunes' by Petch & Swann (1968), this plant has become very much rarer, possibly as a result of nitrification. The Bawsey colony appears healthy and shows signs of spreading, which is good news.

Conditions were moist underfoot, which is ideal for mosses, and also for fungi, and a certain amount of off-piste mycology went on. In particular there were very large numbers of the Slender Club (*Macrotyphula juncea*) and Pipe Club (*Macrotyphula fistulosa*), as well as isolated specimens of Verdigris Agaric (*Stropharia aeruginosa*), Woolly Milkcap (*Lactarius torminosus*), and myriads of small white toadstools - which nobody was prepared to name - and some wonderful stands of Fly Agaric (*Amanita muscaria*).

Vascular plants were all more-or-less dead, which didn't stop Bob Ellis from recording several species, such as Sweet Briar (*Rosa rubiginosa*), Ploughman's Spikenard (*Inula conyza*), and Parrot's Feather (*Myriophyllum aquaticum*), the latter growing on the shores of the main lake. Some discussion took place as to what a Spikenard was, however, subsequent investigation has revealed it not to be some arcane piece of ploughing equipment, but an aromatic oil derived from a variety of plants. Ploughman's Spikenard was, presumably, a cheap version of this.

Robin Stevenson





# HAPPY BIRTHDAY, SIR JAMES

Saturday, December 5<sup>th</sup>, 2009

"He acquired the Linnean collections to be of use to the world, to natural history in general, and to the Linnean Society in particular. He actually started off the whole study of natural history in Britain."

A tribute by Dr Sandra Knapp, Fellow of the Linnean Society and senior research botanist at the Natural History Museum, to a lad from Norwich who became one of the most significant figures in the botanical world but is barely known or acknowledged in his home city.

The occasion was an event, jointly organised by the Society and the Norwich Castle Museum natural history department, to mark the 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of Sir James Edward Smith, on December 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1759.

Dr Tony Irwin, curator of natural history at the museum, told us that Smith's early interest in botany was stimulated by a Norwich apothecary, Hugh Rose. After university, Smith became a friend of Sir Joseph Banks who inspired him to buy – with 1,000 guineas "borrowed" from his father, a wealthy Norwich wool merchant – the collections of the Swedish naturalist, Carolus Linnaeus. He took them initially to London where, with two associates, he founded the Linnean Society and was its president until his death in 1828.

Soon after he married in 1796, he transferred the collections to his house at 29 Surrey Street. "At one point Norwich was the centre of biological and natural history study in the world," said Dr Irwin. "People flocked to his house in Surrey Street." Behind the house Smith had a garden (where there is now a bus station!) and he gave the museum books containing specimens of the plants he grew there. They are among the museum's most treasured possessions to this day.

Dr Knapp said that one of Smith's most important contributions was in "translating" Linnaeus's plant descriptions, which were difficult to understand. He realised the importance of the plant collections because they contained "type specimens" which were the gold standard for identification. He also wrote valuable detailed notes on the many plants he collected.

A copy of Smith's *magnum opus*, the 36-volume *English Botany*, belonging to the N&NNS, is kept in the Castle Museum natural history department.

During the afternoon, Society members were given a private preview of the refurbished natural history gallery in advance of its official reopening on December 16<sup>th</sup>.

David Paull







The next issue of '*The Norfolk Natterjack*' will be May 2010.  
Please send all articles and notes to the editor as soon as possible by  
**April 1<sup>st</sup> 2010** to the following address:

Francis Farrow, 'Heathlands', 6 Havelock Road, Sheringham,  
Norfolk, NR26 8QD Email: francis.f@virgin.net

Please send all photographic material to:  
Simon Harrap, 1 Norwich Road, Edgefield,  
Melton Constable, Norfolk, NR22 2RP Email: harrap@onetel.net

## Membership subscriptions

The N&NNS membership year runs from 1<sup>st</sup> April to 31<sup>st</sup> March.  
During this time members will receive four copies of the quarterly  
*Natterjack* newsletter, and annual copies of the Transactions of the  
Society, and the Norfolk Bird & Mammal Report.

**Membership renewals** are due on *1<sup>st</sup> April each year* and should be sent  
to the treasurer:

- David Richmond, 42 Richmond Rise, Reepham, Norfolk, NR10 4LS.

**New memberships** should be sent to:

- David Paull, 8 Lindford Drive, Eaton, Norwich, NR4 6LT.

**Current rates are £15 for individual, family and group memberships**  
(£25 for individuals living overseas).

*Cheques payable to: Norfolk & Norwich Naturalists' Society.*



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